

Overnight camping approval process changes; county swimming pools offer heat relief and fitness

By Andy Stevens, Interim Community Services Director

It is April and already the mercury is hitting the upper eighties every day, though cooler nights remain and can be enjoyed. Although overnight camping and overnight parking are prohibited in county parks, at last week's commission meeting the Board of County Commissioners approved an ordinance that streamlines the process for obtaining special approval to camp or park overnight. In the past, a request could be placed on the Board's agenda and the County Commissioners would consider approving the special request. Last week's ordinance allows the community services director or their designee to approve special requests for overnight camping and overnight parking. Special approval can now be obtained through the department instead of a lengthy agenda process.

Daytime hours in our area are heating up as we progress towards summer. When looking for some relief from the summer heat, remember your Charlotte County swimming pools. Our Charlotte County community services aquatic staff works hard to provide high quality and affordable programs, activities and events in a safe, well-supervised and well-maintained environment.

Charlotte County community services operates three beautiful pools, each with great amenities and a unique "feel." Port Charlotte Beach Pool is located on Charlotte Harbor at 4500 Harbor Boulevard in Port Charlotte and is one of the most beautiful spots in the county. South County Regional Park Pool, at 670 Cooper Street in Punta Gorda, boasts eleven twenty-five yard lanes for lap swimming, a large shallow water play area and a separate diving well equipped with a one meter diving board. Oyster Creek Regional Park Pool, at 6791 San Casa Drive in Englewood, features eight twenty-five yard lanes for lap swimming, a large shallow water play area and an attached dive well equipped with a one meter diving board. The two regional pools also have special recreation equipment such as water basketball hoops and giant inflatable water volleyball games, and all county aquatic facilities are equipped with locker rooms and showers.

Come and cool off at the many special events held at the county swimming pools. These events include the music-themed Moonlight Swims throughout the summer, the Swim for Scholarships in May to raise money to help county residents participate in swim lessons, and of course April Pool's Day. Held April 14 at South County Regional Park Pool and April 21 at Oyster Creek Regional Park Pool, April Pool's Day is an open house event at the pools and features live music, free swim lessons, free water aerobics classes, rescue demonstrations from County Lifeguards, SCUBA Search and recovery demonstrations from the Punta Gorda police department and Charlotte County sheriff's office, and a giant inflatable water slide. There will also be contest, including the annual "Lightning Mile Swim" and biggest splash contest where participants compete to win medals in age group categories. Admission is free to April Pool's Day!

The main focus of the aquatic programming at county pools is instruction and water safety education. All Charlotte County swim instructors are American Red Cross certified and lessons are available for ages six months to adult, in groups and private lessons, as well as during summer camp. Swim lessons are affordably priced, and Charlotte County residents who want to participate in swim lessons but are unable to afford them are encouraged to apply for a scholarship through the kids swim lesson connection program. Also available is lifeguard training and water safety instructor training, in partnership with the American Red Cross. For more information about Charlotte County aquatic programs or any community services programs, please visit www.CharlotteCountyFL.com.